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ABSTRACT

This student guide dicusses the problem of sex discrimination: what it is, where it exists in schools, how it can affect the lives of males and females, and how Title IX can help end discriminatory practices. Written by a group of high school students, this document defines sex discrimination, and gives examples of sex discrimination, sex bias, and sex role stereotyping in the schools in such areas as course selection, guidance and counseling, and textbook development and selection. Problems of career choice are shown to be, in part, a result of sex role stereotyping in the schools. The special problems of young men and women in vocational schools and of minority women are discussed. (Author/RLV)

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Sex Discrimination in Schools:

A Student Perspective

A Student Guide to Equal Rights: Part 1

Massachusetts Department of Education

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
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EDUCATION

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About the Series

Students are often in the best position to know if their schools are discriminating against them on the basis of their sex. Working together or with teachers, parents and community groups, they can do a great deal to change discriminatory practices that exist in schools.

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 is a federal law that prohibits sex discrimination in the admission and treatment of students in educational programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance. Sex discrimination in the employment policies and practices in these institutions receiving federal funds is also prohibited.

This three part series was written by a group of high school students in Massachusetts who are working to make Title IX happen in their own schools by informing students and teachers about sex discrimination. The purpose of the series is to provide students with the information and resources they need to deal with sex discrimination in their schools. The series contains three handbooks:

Part I, "Sex Discrimination in Schools — A Student Perspective," discusses the problem of sex discrimination, what it is, where it exists in schools, how it can affect the lives of males and females and how Title IX can help end discriminatory practices.

Part II, "Title IX: An Overview of the Law," explains in simple language each section of the Title IX regulations and gives examples of how they apply to schools.

Part III, "Title IX: An Action Guide for Students," discusses a series of activities that students can follow to end discrimination in their schools. These include: conducting workshops for students about Title IX, working with administrators, teachers, and students to identify Title IX issues in their schools, publicizing Title IX issues in schools and finally, filing a Title IX grievance.

This series is designed to make students aware of their rights guaranteed by Title IX and to assist them in their efforts to obtain a sex fair education in their own schools.

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How to Use This Booklet

Sex discrimination does not happen only in schools, nor does it begin there. Before you can begin to recognize sex discrimination in your school, you must understand what discrimination is and why it occurs. This booklet is designed to familiarize you with sex discrimination.

All terms underlined in this booklet are defined in the glossary (p. 19). Examples of sex discrimination and sex bias in schools are based on the authors' own experiences and those of other students with whom they have worked. Since this booklet presents an overview of the topic, it may not tell you everything you want to know about sex discrimination. At the end of the booklet you will find a bibliography of books and pamphlets which will provide you with additional information.

"I Think Sex Discrimination Is"

When asked to define sex discrimination, students responded:

"...unequal treatment of either sex. It has resulted in unequal status under the law. It can make a person feel humiliated."

"... when a person identifies other people by what sex they are, not what they can do, for example, saying that a woman can't do what a man can do because she is 'gentle' and 'feminine!'"

"...the result of a preconceived notion. It happens when people are thought of in a certain way because of their sex, not because of their own abilities or thoughts."

"...judging people on the basis of sex as opposed to judging them on other criteria which are more relevant."

What Is Sex Discrimination?

Sex discrimination can be understood as any policy, decision or program which limits an individual's choices or opportunities because of his or her sex. It exists in many areas of our lives, but is a special problem in education, since what happens to us in school has an important effect on our lives after graduation.

In school, sex discrimination occurs when someone says "this course is for girl's only" or "this team is for boy's only." Sex discrimination occurs whenever you are not allowed full participation in a school program just because you are male or just because you are a female. The result is that you are not allowed to gain experience, skills or training in an area of your interest - just because of your sex. Sex discrimination can take two forms in schools. It occurs when there are different requirements for boys and girls, or when boys and/or girls are PROHIBITED OR PREVENTED from entering certain school programs because of their sex.

When a school requires males to take industrial arts and females to take home economics, or prohibits males from taking home economics or females from taking industrial arts, a decision is made about those students on the basis of their sex. The decision is that males and females need different skills for their adult lives. This decision assumes that a woman will never need to build shelves for her apartment or fix a broken chair, and that a man will never have to cook for himself or sew a button on his shirt.

The belief that males and females should have different skills is called sex bias. Sex discrimination is an action that results from that belief. In many ways, sex discrimination is easier to recognize and deal with than sex bias. It is not hard to recognize that your gym classes are not coed or that your school has different course requirements for males and females. This is discrimination. However, sex bias may not be as clear cut. When someone discourages you from taking a particular course which may be considered a "girl's" course or a "boy's" course, you don't always know why. Is that person really considering your interests and skills or is (s)he making a judgement about what (s)he thinks is proper or appropriate for boys and girls?

Sex discrimination and sex bias affect you in two ways. First you are denied the opportunity to gain certain skills, information or experience. Second, you may begin to believe that you cannot or should not learn about something which might interest you--just because you're a male or a female.

For example, have you ever wanted to do something, like take dancing lessons if you're a guy, and been afraid to because people might laugh and call you a sissy, or because someone told you not to waste your time? The belief that it is not proper for boys to take dancing lessons prevents you from enjoying an activity you like.

Another action which results from sex bias is sex role stereotyping. When people assume that all members of one sex have the same characteristics, abilities and interests they are sex role stereotyping. This may occur, for example, in a gym class where the instructor assumes that all males like football and all females prefer gymnastics.

Sex bias, sex discrimination and sex role stereotyping affect males and females alike. They can affect the opportunities you have when you're in school and after you graduate. They influence the way you see yourself and the way others see you.

Males and females have the same potential to achieve in areas which interest them. Through a gradual change in attitudes and because of state and federal laws which prohibit discrimination, the opportunities available to both sexes are increasing. However, these problems still exist in many areas of our lives.

When Does Sex Discrimination Begin in School?

Socialization is the way we learn what behavior is proper and socially acceptable. By observing and imitating the behavior of adults around us we gradually develop our own patterns of adult behavior that conform to what we see. Learning that we must wear clothes is one example of socialization - people in another culture may be socialized to wear different clothes or no clothes at all, depending upon what is socially acceptable in their culture.

Sex-Role Socialization is learning what is considered proper behavior for males and females. As children we are taught to act like "good little boys" and "good little girls". This may mean we "learn" that girls should wear dresses and boys should not, or that boys should wear jeans and girls should not.

In many cases, sex-role socialization can limit the development of a person's interests and abilities. For instance, girls may be taught to dress neatly, cook, and play with dolls, while boys are taught to be tough and aggressive and to play with guns and trucks. In this way, a boy who likes to cook or a girl who enjoys sports "learns" that that activity is not appropriate for his or her sex.

Your parents play a major part in the sex-role socialization process that occurs at home. At school, teachers, principals and guidance counselors can have an important influence. Whether or not sex-role socialization limits your opportunities depends on whether the adults around you are sex biased. People's values differ, and you may observe very different behavior in parents and teachers. For example, your parents may be sex biased and believe that males and females should be taught different skills, while your teachers may believe that males and females should have the same opportunities, or your teachers may be sex biased while your parents are not. If there are adults around you who are sex biased, you, yourself, may begin to believe that males and females have different interests and abilities. Recognizing sex bias in those around you is the first step in freeing yourself from its influence.

By the time a child enters kindergarten, he or she will have a good idea how boys and girls are expected to act. The situation in school can either support or discourage the child's behavior and interests. For example, some schools separate boys and girls during recess, having them play at different activities. A young boy who likes to jump rope, or a girl who prefers kick ball should have a chance to choose the activities in which (s)he will participate. When children are separated by sex for activities their feeling that males and females MUST have different interests is strengthened.

Sex discrimination also occurs in day care centers and kindergartens. Often, girls are given dolls, dishes and dress-up clothes, while boys may be encouraged to use blocks or play at fireman and policeman. When this occurs, someone assumes that ALL girls are interested in dolls and ALL boys like to play fireman. This, again, is sex-role stereotyping.

Even if a school does not separate children on the basis of sex, the attitudes of teachers may limit children's activities. A girl who wants to play police may not do so if her teacher discourages her by telling her that her behavior is "unladylike". Schools should make an effort to support and encourage students to try different activities that interest them regardless of sex.

Where Does Sex Discrimination Occur in High Schools?

In high schools sex discrimination may occur in both educational and social activities. Studies indicate that females who are highly motivated and do well in elementary school begin to fall behind when they reach high school.* This may be due in part to the biased attitudes they encounter throughout their school years.

Sometimes sex bias and discrimination simply take the form of generalized statements like "You're a boy, you shouldn't do that", or "Girls just don't do as well as boys in math". Or some classes may be labeled "for boys only" or "for girls only". Traditionally, for instance, electronics and machine shop courses have been reserved for males while sewing, cooking and child care have been considered female concerns.

Females can also be discriminated against in extra-curricular sports. Often, male athletes have more kinds of sports from which to choose, better equipment and publicity and more money than female athletes.

In the classroom, the sexist message may be more subtle. For instance, many history textbooks and courses contain little or no information about women—the role they played and the contributions they made—during different periods in history. When the only persons included in history books are male, the inference is that women are not important enough to be included. The same holds true for women in the arts, in mathematics, and in science. When math word problems include women only measuring flour or counting students in a classroom, and men only surveying the distance across a river or handling large sums of money, they reinforce the belief that certain subjects and certain careers are for men only or women only.

Men can also be discriminated against in the classroom. In many cases, a male student may be punished more severely than a female for breaking the same school rule.

What are the effects of sex discrimination in the classroom? First, it may cause students to develop sex bias themselves. Girls may decide that they should not play sports, that they should not take the most challenging courses available, that they should not strive to be an more than a good wife and mother. Boys may feel that they must be tough and agressive, that they must prepare to support a family in the future, that they must not do "women's work" like cooking and sewing. In other words, students are not taught to develop fully, but are taught to stay within the bounds of what others consider appropriate for their sex.

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*Lucy Komisar, The New Feminism, (New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1971), pp. 28-30.

Sex bias also occurs in high school social life. In the social sphere students encounter sex bias in the attitudes of family, friends, and in their own expectations for the behavior of males and females. As one student explains, "Sometimes it is hard to satisfy my personal standards as well as the expectations of my friends. Often as a girl I feel I should only fool around or flirt with guys and never try to talk seriously, especially about sex discrimination".

When you are afraid to do something because of what your friends and classmates might think or say about you, you experience peer group pressure. You want to be liked and included by your friends, so you may conform to what they think is right. However, this pressure can limit your development and prevent you from doing what you want if your interests conflict with what your friends consider "correct" interests.

Guidance and Counseling

One of the areas in which sex bias and sex discrimination occur most often in schools is guidance and counseling. Discrimination in this area can have serious, long-lasting effects on a student's life. Even when all courses are open to all students, biased guidance counselors may attempt to persuade males and females to enroll in traditional courses. Or students who have already developed different expectations for males and females may refuse to consider non-traditional choices. Both have the effect of steering males and females into stereotyped careers.

Pressure from guidance counselors to take certain courses and not others on the basis of sex leaves both males and females at an educational disadvantage. Students without sufficient preparation face difficulty pursuing the career of their choice. Moreover, a female discouraged from exploring different career options may begin to believe that her only option in life is to become a wife and mother, while a male discouraged from enrolling in art courses may soon abandon his dream of becoming a modern Picasso.

Faced with sex bias, many students steer or track themselves into "acceptable" courses in preparation for "acceptable" careers, avoiding non-traditional courses to escape ridicule from teachers, counselors, parents, and other students.

Many guidance counselors already do, and all guidance counselors should, encourage students to consider all courses and career choices available before signing up for classes. In addition, counselors should support males and females who enroll in non-traditional courses and encourage other students to do so if they wish. In this way students will begin to realize that they can develop fully as individuals and prepare for careers which interest them, not ones which others consider proper.

What Happens After Graduation?

The effects of sex discrimination do not end when you receive your diploma. Limits placed on your opportunities in school may affect your ability to choose a career, achieve your vocational goals, and even take care of certain basic needs of everyday life. A female student interested in architecture who has been discouraged from taking mechanical drawing in high school may not be able to pursue a career in drafting or Civil Engineering. A male whose exposure to career counseling information has been limited to a few traditional roles will have only those options to consider after graduation. Both males and females need certain basic skills like cooking, typing, and elementary auto mechanics because no one can count on having another person, male or female, take care of these things. The important point is that the effects of sex discrimination stay with you after graduation. You may find you have to work twice as hard to catch up on the skills you were denied.

Discrimination also exists in the working world. In many fields sex discrimination occurs in promotion and hiring. In education, for example, many women hold jobs as teachers, but few are secondary school principals, superintendents or administrators. Men, on the other hand, hold many administrative positions but few are primary school teachers. Trends of this type result from two forms of sexism. The job of primary school teacher was considered "fitting" for women, and women were encouraged to choose this career. For the same reason, men were discouraged from this occupation and were directed toward secondary school teaching and school administration. This type of self-tracking is the result of sex bias. In addition, some schools actively discriminated against women who applied for jobs in school administration or men who applied for jobs as elementary school teachers. There are Federal and State laws which prohibit sex discrimination in employment, just as Title IX does in educational institutions. Under these laws employees must be evaluated on the basis of their abilities, without regard to their sex. Title VI, for example, is a law which prohibits race discrimination in any program receiving Federal funds while Title VII covers problems of discrimination in employment. Together, these Federal laws prevent discrimination on the basis of race, sex, color, or creed.

Sex bias exists in the social sphere of society just as it does in high school. Attitudes are changing slowly as men and women gain equal rights. With more women working, from choice and from necessity, men must begin to take more responsibility for parenting and household duties. Men can no longer assume that they will be the only breadwinners in the family, because increasingly, couples find they need more than one income. Since more men and women are now choosing to stay single, both sexes must prepare to care for themselves both at home and in the working world.

Sex Discrimination and Title IX

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 is a federal law which protects students from sex discrimination. It prohibits sex discrimination in the admission and treatment of students and in the employment practices of all educational programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance. Regulations establishing the specific responsibilities of schools to develop policies and practices which do not discriminate by sex took effect in July of 1975.

As a result of Title IX and its regulations schools may no longer assign students to courses on the basis of sex or provide fewer opportunities in athletics for females because of a biased belief that females have different interests and abilities than males. Part II of this series, "Title IX: An Overview of the Law," explains in simple terms the Title IX regulations.

While Title IX protects you from sex discrimination in school programs, it cannot guarantee protection from an individual's sex bias. The law prohibits policies and programs which discriminate, but it cannot control the attitudes of school officials, teachers, guidance counselors, parents and other students who may try to discourage you from pursuing interests that do not fit their ideas about what males and females should do.

Along with your right to a sex fair education comes the responsibility to exercise that right. Students are often in the best position to know if their school programs are sex fair or if they discriminate. If your school discriminates against males or

females or if school officials are taking a long time to adapt school programs to the law, you and your fellow students lose out. Since the law was written for your benefit it is important that you understand how to use it.

Vocational Schools

Young men and women in vocational technical high schools may face unique problems of sex discrimination. During their first year in vocational school students enroll in exploratory courses in each shop, such as commercial foods, electronics, or drafting. In their second year each selects the trade (s)he wishes to study. A student preparing for a job as a mechanic will spend three years in the mechanics shop while a student interested in nursing will spend his/her time in the health shop.

Unfortunately, many trades have traditionally been considered for men only or for women only, and thus many shops have remained sex-segregated. In fact, until recently many vocational schools recruited only male students. The training offered by those schools, such as auto mechanics, electronics, and drafting, were considered "men's work". Females were often denied admission to these schools.

Title IX now prohibits sex-segregated vocational schools, as well as recruitment practices which discriminate on the basis of sex. Language and pictures in recruitment materials must represent both male and female students in shops of all types. Under Title IX, vocational schoools now actively recruit females as well as males.

In spite of the changes required by law, sex bias remains a problem in vocational schools. Entering a trade considered to be in the sphere of the opposite sex is difficult for both males and females. In addition to opposition from teachers, administrators, their parents and even their friends, these students may encounter problems with facilities as well. For example, many mechanics shops were built when only males used them. No changing rooms or toilets for females were constructed, creating difficulties for the women who now use these shops. These difficulties reinforce the belief that it is unusual for a male or female to enroll in a "non-traditional" shop and may discourage students from doing so.

By requiring vocational schools to provide equal opportunity and facilities for both sexes, Title IX has eliminated some of these problems. And as more males and females enroll in courses which are not traditional for their sex people's attitudes are slowly changing as well. Nevertheless, students attending or entering vocational schools should be aware of the special problems of sex bias and discrimination they may encounter.

Discrimination Against Minority Women

Women who are members of minority groups, including Blacks, Hispanics, Asians and Native Americans, face the problems of double discrimination in school and in society. Although Title IX deals with sexism, not racism, it is important to be aware of the special problems experienced by minority women. They may encounter discrimination because they are female. They may also encounter discrimination because they are nonwhite. Like sex discrimination and bias, race discrimination and race bias limit the opportunities available to individuals. Minority woman may find that their opportunities are limited to a greater extent than those of minority men, white women and white men because of other people's race and sex bias. Race discrimination and race bias affect the way other people treat you, which, in turn, can affect the feelings you have about yourself.

Historically, race discrimination in schools existed because of policies which allowed or required the existence of racially segregated schools. Schools maintained for minority groups were rarely given the same financial support as those for white students. In 1954, in a court case called Brown v. Board of Education, the United States Supreme Court ruled that race separate schools, even those given financial support equal to that of schools for white students, are unconstitutional. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is a federal law which prohibits race discrimination in many areas of public life, including education. It means that students must be treated without regard to race. It also prohibits the separation of students along racial or ethnic lines. Like Title IX this law supports the idea that all students should be given the same opportunities to develop their talents and interests in an environment which supports and encourages them.

In spite of the law race discrimination and race bias still exist. Racism in schools may occur in the form of policies which prohibit or discourage members of a particular race from participation in certain school programs. Such policies are illegal. Race bias is another form in which racism occurs in schools and its effects are just as serious as those of race discrimination. A guidance counselor who advises a black student interested in animal medicine that he or she would not do well or would not be comfortable because "There just aren't many blacks in that field" is imposing their own biased beliefs on that student. Students who are told often enough that they cannot succeed at a task because of their race or sex may begin to doubt their abilities.

In the working world, minority women are discriminated against more than any other group. For example, the Massachusetts Census of 1970 shows that minority women hold positions of low status more often than white women. Approximately 36% of all working women held jobs as blue collar, service or farm workers. Among working women who are black or Hispanic about 51% were found in this category. Sales or clerical workers accounted for 44% of all working women. 35% of working black women and 33% of working Hispanic women were found in this category. The professional, managerial and administrative category included 20% of all women, 14% of working black women and 16% of working Hispanic women.* Minority and white women are paid less than minority men and white men. Minority women with some college education are paid less than men with only eight years of schooling.+

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*U.S. Census of the Population, 1970, characteristics of the population by state, Table 171.
+Alice Sargent, "Minority Women's Issues", from Beyond Sex Roles (New York: West Publishing Co., 1977), p. 256.

The fact that minority women face race discrimination as well as sex discrimination in school and in society means that they face a form of double discrimination which is different than that affecting any other group. Just as it is important for both males and females to understand what sex discrimination and sex bias are and how they affect our lives, it is important for both whites and minorities to be aware of racism and to work towards ending it.

Glossary

Non-traditional: used to describe school courses or careers pursued by males or females which historically have not been considered appropriate careers for their sex. Truck driving is a non-traditional career for females, while nursery school teaching would be considered non-traditional for males.

Peer group pressure: the influence of friends and other like yourself when you decide not to do something you would really like to do solely because you are concerned that your peers (people your age) will not approve, you are succumbing to peer group pressure.

Sex bias: (a set of beliefs) the underlying network of assumptions that males and females are and should be different, not only physically, but also in their personalities, abilities, and occupations. Bias may be a conscious or unconscious attitude.

Sex discrimination: (an action) the denial of opportunity, privilege or participation on the basis of sex. Sex discrimination refers to the act of an individual who or institution which treats individuals differently because they are male or female. Discrimination in the context of schools usually implies that a student has been prevented from full and fair participation in a school program or activity. Sex discrimination in schools is an act which does not comply with Title IX.

Sex-role stereotyping: (an action) the association of certain characteristics with all the members of a particular sex.

"A stereotype is based on the assumption that because a number of individuals share one attribute, e.g. race or sex, they are similar in all others. Stereotypes arise from our natural need to organize the world around us. They may result in oversimplified beliefs, attitudes or uncritical judgement. A sex role stereotype may be defined as the assumption that all males and females, because they share a common gender, also share common abilities, interests, values and roles."
(Michigan Department of Education)

Sex-role socialization: process by which a person learns what is expected of him or her as a male or female.

Socialization: process by which an individual learns what behavior is acceptable in society.

Bibliography of Resources

Resource Materials:

The following PEER publication materials will be sent to you upon request without any charge. We strongly urge that you write for them because they are an excellent source of information.

1. "Resources for Ending Sex Bias in Education"

2. "Cracking the Glass Slipper: PEER's Guide to Ending Sex Bias in Your Schools"

3. "Anyone's Guide to Filing a Title IX Complaint"

PEER (Project on Equal Education Rights)
1029 Vermont Avenue, NW
Suite 800
Washington, DC 20005

Curricula:

Feminist Resources for Schools and Colleges:
A guide to Curricular Materials
Feminist Press, Box 334, Old Westbury, New York 11568

History:

Century of Struggle - The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States
Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959.

Sexism in Education:

And Jill Came Tumbling After: Sexism in American Education.
Stacey, Judith; Bereaud, Susan; and Daniels, Joan (eds.)
Available from: Dell Publishing, Inc. 1 Dag Hammarskjold Plaza, New York, NY 10017

"Sexism in Education", Emma Willard Task Force on Education
Box 14229
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55414

Vocational Education

"Equal Vocational Education"
Lerner, Jane; Berystrom, Fredell and Champagne, Joseph E.
Center for Human Resources
University of Houston, College of Business Administration
Cullen Blvd., Houston, Texas 770021
single copies free

"Women in Non-Traditional Occupations: A Bibliography"
Write to: Bureau of Occupational and Adult Education
U.S. Office of Education
400 Maryland Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20202
single copies free

Athletics:

"Shedding Light on Title IX - What You Need to Know to Make it Work."
Hogan, Candace Lyle, Woman Sports, February 1976

"Revolution in Women's Sports"
Woman Sports, September 1974